Idaho Currents

Recent Rain Storms Improve Water Supply, But State Still Predicts Another Dry Year

Idaho's water supply outlook for 2005 has improved dramatically in many parts of the state in recent weeks, but the long cycle of drought is far from over, according to the Idaho Water Supply Committee.

In the Big Wood and Lost River basins, rainfall since May 1 has reached levels that are 230 percent of normal. In the Southwestern Idaho, the first 10 days of the month have brought precipitation levels that are 215 percent of normal.

Two months ago, it appeared 2005 might be the worst moisture year on record in the Treasure Valley. Now it looks like accumulations in that part of the state could recover to near average levels by the end of the month.

The series of spring storms have caused some planting problems for farmers, but have also delayed irrigation demand meaning the supply should last until September but is still less than a full supply.

Recreational opportunities look much more promising, too. Reservoirs levels should be maintained at higher levels for longer periods of time than was predicted earlier this year. For instance, Lucky Peak Reservoir east of Boise should remain full until mid to late July.

While the short-term water picture is certainly improved, it is important to remember that Idaho is still gripped by a drought cycle that happens approximately once every 500 years.

Six straight years of below normal precipitation levels have caused a water deficit of about 14 inches in Southwestern Idaho, which amounts to about a year's worth of precipitation for much of the state.

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It's Just a Matter of Habit – Turn Off the Water When You Don't Need It!

It's no secret that we couldn't exist without water. But as Idaho approaches its sixth consecutive year of drought conditions, it's a good time to think about living with less water on a daily basis.

- Did you know that by shortening your showers by even a minute or two each day your can save up to 700 gallons of water each month? By installing water-saving showerheads or flow restrictors, you can save another 500-800 gallons of water each month.

- Keep a pitcher of water in the refrigerator so you don't have to let the tap run for a while before the water is cold. To help reduce the use of excess glasses in the dishwasher, encourage each family member to use one glass per day.

- One of the most effective and inexpensive ways to save water is by installing a low-flow faucet aerator on all your household faucets.

- Be sure to turn off the water when brushing your teeth or shaving.

On The Cover

Top photo: **Looking at the New York Canal on April 1, 2005, the cement-lined canal winds through residential, industrial and agricultural areas between the Boise River Diversion Dam and the eastern end of Lake Lowell. The canal's capacity is about 2,700 cubic feet per second and the flow rate during a normal May is 2,140 cfs.**
Bottom photo: **On May 3, the New York Canal diverted 1,034 cubic feet per second. The canal is operating very conservatively this year to enable water to last as long as possible through the summer. The cool weather has helped keep irrigation needs fairly low for this time of year.** ***(Photos by Diane Holt)***

- When washing clothes, set the regulator for the size of load. Remember to use cold water, instead of warm or hot, for both washing and rinsing to help save energy.

What about outdoors?

- Do you know when your lawn needs water? Step on your grass. If it springs back when you lift your foot, it doesn't need water.

- If you have an automatic sprinkler system, set the timer so it allows more days between watering and multiple start times spaced one hour apart. This allows the water to soak into the soil and avoid run-off.

- Install a rain shutoff device on your sprinkler system. Allowing your sprinkler to continue working while it's raining can waste a lot of water.

- Before you start using your automatic sprinkler system, check the sprinkler valves and heads for leaks.

- Water your lawn during the cooler parts of the day. Early morning is better than dusk, because it helps prevent the growth of fungus. Avoid watering the lawn on windy days. There's too much evaporation.

- When washing your car, don't leave the water running through the hose unnecessarily. Use a bucket of water to wash your vehicle, then rinse it with running water.

- Consult your local nursery before planting grass and shrubs. Plants and grass that need less water can accomplish the same goal as those that need a lot of water.

Each person in the United States uses about 50 gallons of water a day. By consciously working to conserve this natural resource, you can help save the environment and still have a refreshing drink of water whenever you turn on your faucet.

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Small Idaho School District Replaces Old Heating System With Biomass

Council School District has found a solution to its energy dilemma, and it's a triple hit!

An official groundbreaking ceremony at the school district site on May 2 began the construction of a new biomass heating system that will be fueled with wood chips. The system will heat buildings on the district's campus, including the elementary and senior high schools.

The school district, in a small town of about 1,000 people, has been experiencing huge power and utility bills for several years. The buildings that make up the school district's campus have been heated with a radiant electric heat in the elementary school and an old diesel-fueled boiler.

In addition, none of the buildings have fresh air ventilation or air conditioning for use during summer school in June and August.

Representatives from the Council School District, U.S. Forest Service, Siemens Building Technologies and the Energy Division marked the site where a new biomass heating system will be constructed. Holding the shovels are Murray Dalgleish (left), superintendent for Council School District, and David Naccarato, Siemens. ***(Photo by Linda Cawley)***

Financing

The entire project will cost $2.8 million. Two grants from the U.S. Forest Service's "Fuels For Schools" program for $510,000 will help cover the cost of installing the new heating system. A $2.2 million bond passed by the district's patrons will pay the remainder.

Council taxpayers will pay $1.2 million on the bond and the remaining $1 million will be paid by the school district.

Through the Energy Division's Rebuild Idaho Program, Siemens Building Technologies of Boise completed an audit on the buildings in 2003. The audit showed that by using a biomass heat system, updating the lighting and installing automated controls, the district could save $1 million in energy the first 15 years.

"This has been two years in the planning and we are finally breaking ground," says Murray Dalgleish, superintendent for Council School District. "This is the result of a lot of hard work, and we need to thank the Forest Service for the grant, Sieman's Corporation, and the patrons of the school district who saw the need and addressed it.

"We also want to thank Sue Seifert with the Idaho Energy Division. Without all her hard work, none of this would have happened."

Science Demonstration

In addition to the new heating system, the district received a $94,800 grant from the U.S. Forest Service-Southwest Idaho Resource Advisory Committee to build two 900-square-foot greenhouses to conduct agricultural science demonstration projects.

The new biomass system will heat the greenhouses, a win-win situation for the Forest Service, the school district, its patrons, and Council's high school students.